



THE
SPARK
AND THE
GRIND

IGNITE THE POWER OF
DISCIPLINED CREATIVITY

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CREATIVITY IS A COMPLICATED FRIEND

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But not at first.

When you and creativity initially met, you were young and the friendship was fast and easy. Wherever you went, creativity went, too. It never argued about the rules or who went first or whether an idea was relevant. And no matter how many times the two of you crashed and burned, creativity dusted itself off and was ready for more.

Then, sometime in middle school or high school, your relationship with creativity started to change. It's hard to say whose fault it was, but suffice it to say you two began growing up and growing apart.

You sought creativity's input less and less. Schoolwork and homework didn't require its companionship, and while you remembered fondly those carefree hours in the backyard—maybe even missed them now and then—there wasn't time for that anymore. Getting older meant your time was occupied by more “mature” activities. Your

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days of role-playing and fort building were replaced by studying and socializing and sports. Although creativity was welcome when it showed up, its youthful exuberance made things a little awkward. It was like a goofy younger sibling who wants to join but doesn't really fit in.

Creativity tagged along for a little while but eventually it just stopped showing up. You understood; it was an amicable separation, after all. You and creativity had simply grown apart. You didn't have the chemistry you once did.

One day, a few years later—probably when you set out to write your college entrance essay—you realized you could use creativity's input again. You called it up and asked it to coffee . . . but when you two sat down, creativity was cold. The relationship had become complicated—a connection that required work. Getting anything out of creativity was like pulling teeth. But with the help of a venti latte and a cinnamon scone, you got through the ordeal. Your entrance essay written, you said good-bye and parted ways again.

You went to college. You got a job. Maybe you got married and had some great kids. Now here you are. How many years has it been since you were close to creativity? Even as you reflect on how long it's been, you—like everyone else—hear creativity's name frequently. It's become a celebrity! Countless articles and books are written about it. Seminars praise its power. Gurus promise to reveal its secrets. Studies prove its indispensability. Everyone wants to know creativity again. Everyone wants a piece—to touch its cloak, to kiss its ring, to kneel at its altar.

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What it is about creativity that draws us in? If we grasp it, understand it, embody it, we believe it can give us a new start. A first step. A cutting edge. A breath of fresh air. A breakthrough. Originality. Freedom.

Our desire for creativity is one of the most transcendent desires of our lives—if not *the* most. That's because our desire for creativity is ultimately a longing for more meaning, and more meaning breathes more life into our days. When our creations are an unobstructed outflow of our purest thoughts, beliefs, and convictions, our doing is in step with our being.

I'm not a vaunted sociologist, but I don't believe it takes a PhD to see that events over the past two decades—from 9/11 to the Great Recession to the rapid emergence of social media and the persistence of terrorism—have led to a recalibration of both personal and corporate values. Sure, the ability to BS ourselves and others will always remain. But the state of our world has prompted us to consider more deeply why we are doing what we are doing and where we are going. The beauty is that we live in an age where quick change is more possible than it's ever been. If we don't like why we are doing what we're doing or where we are heading, we have instant access to infinite resources that can help us alter our pace, direction, or trajectory. And we believe that creativity will get us to a better place, faster.

Whether or not you've experienced the spoils of creativity in your own life, we have all observed that a tight bond with creativity forges freedom and opportunity quite unlike anything else. Whether or not we understand it, we often desire it in the areas of our lives

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that matter most. We especially desire it in the areas where we sense we are either underperforming or off track.

This attraction is much bigger and broader than a desire to be a better artist in the traditional sense of the word. It's not just the authors, fashionistas, and interior designers looking for an in with creativity. All of us are looking for communion with creativity, including:

- Parents wanting to shape rambunctious offspring into thriving adults.
- Coaches scrapping for the secret sauce to inspire this year's team.
- Managers searching for the keys to engaging a new generation.
- Investors foraging for the next Spotify.
- Entrepreneurs aiming to become the next Elon Musk.
- Executives crafting the ideal culture.
- Lovers longing to last.

Creativity is a scorching-hot commodity. We are paying for it in historically large sums. And yet the investment isn't paying off as we'd expect.

On the corporate level, efforts to court creativity translate to serious money. According to "2015 Global Innovation 1000," a report produced by PricewaterhouseCoopers's consulting team Strategy& that details how much the top thousand public companies spend on innovation each year, total spending "increased 5.1% to \$680 billion" in 2015. The top five companies leading the way were:

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1. Volkswagen, at \$15.3 billion or 5.7 percent of revenue
2. Samsung, at \$14.1 billion or 7.2 percent of revenue
3. Intel, at \$11.5 billion or 20.6 percent of revenue
4. Microsoft, at \$11.4 billion or 13.1 percent of revenue
5. Roche (a biopharmaceutical company), at \$10.8 billion or 20.8 percent of revenue

And yet, after conducting ten thousand analyses, the same study found no statistical relationship between increased innovation spending and:

- sales growth
- gross profit growth
- operating profit growth
- operating margin
- net profit growth
- net margin
- market cap growth
- and total shareholder return

In fact, the study's ten most innovative companies based on performance (led by Apple, Google, and Tesla) cumulatively outperformed the top ten spenders by nearly 10 percent—a trend that has held true for the last six years. Clearly, there is a tangible difference between treating creativity like a health supplement and treating it like the ecosystem in which your company breathes and operates. While casual dress codes, company retreats, and brand renovations

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can be effective additives in the body of a highly creative ecosystem, they are merely antacids in an organization that does not breathe creativity.

If you're not in the corporate world or otherwise affected by corporate performance, you're not out of the woods either. If you're, say, a full-time parent or a high school teacher or a physician in private practice, I daresay the same ineffectiveness is true for your personal investments into creativity and innovation. Legitimate statistics for individual R&D spending are nonexistent, but how many creativity seminars (or YouTube videos) have left you feeling full of inspiration that faded within a couple of weeks (if not days) and never translated into any sustained difference in your work or home life? How many blogs, articles, and books on innovation have you read that felt like they lit a flame under you, burning hot only until your creativity chops were actually tested? Generally speaking, how have your investments into bettering your creativity worked out for you thus far? I hope much better than what most people experience, which is that the burning flame didn't amount to much more in reality than a flicker of hope that always burnt out—fodder for a great tweet, but not for sparking greater imagination or fresh improvements in your life.

If you're like most, you're left to wonder: how is it that creativity seems to ooze from some people's pores while others struggle to squeeze out a great idea once a year? Maybe once a lifetime?

The relationship between you and creativity today is complicated. Let's start there. It's not effortless like it was when you were young. You have changed. Creativity has changed. Life is different

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now. You did, in fact, grow apart. Traditional schooling and typical corporate protocol has taught you that creativity isn't as important as finding the correct answer or following the correct strategy (as if there is always just one). As a result, your relationship with creativity takes real work today. And that's where the relationship stalls—even ends—for many of us.

The common practical response to this realization is that you will work at being more creative only when you need to—like when your marriage is dry or your job is drying up or your customer needs something better. It's the whole “necessity is the mother of invention” thing. So like a lonely former lover, you swallow your pride and reach out for some attention from creativity when you're feeling needy.

The common cynical response to realizing that connecting with creativity is hard is the proclamation that being creative on a regular basis is unrealistic and, frankly, takes a certain kind of quiriness that doesn't play in all settings. “Creativity wasn't handed out to everyone for a reason” is the message.

Having internalized this message, people settle, and the act of creativity is relegated to requiring 1) a great need, or 2) an eccentric nature. It makes the kind of daily relationship with creativity you had as a child seem completely out of the question, unless you're willing to be desperate or odd. The truth, however, is that you can rekindle that relationship. You just have to understand how to do it as an adult, because the way it works has changed. Here's what I mean.

Your childhood experience with creativity was real. To start, you needed creativity to learn your first language and understand

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how to get by in the world outside your mother's womb. Your brain and body were focused on breathing in as much data as possible to try to understand as much as possible. You didn't know, or care to know, what data mattered and what data didn't. You possessed an unconscious trust that the important concepts would illuminate themselves to you in time. In the meantime, you attempted much, ventured into whatever caught your attention, and had fun while doing it. Most importantly, you learned. Rapidly, in fact. You also started becoming who you would grow up to be.

Creativity was your trusty travel partner then. You trusted the relationship, or perhaps it's more accurate to say your genetic makeup trusted it. The products of your trust in creativity didn't always come easy. Remember skinned knees, twisted ankles, and burned fingers? You just accepted that you didn't know what you needed to know. And you innately understood that if you stuck with creativity, you would learn.

The neuroscience associated with this is heady, but the gist is that from the minute you were born you already had all the neurons you needed for a lifetime of learning. But those brain cells weren't yet linked with the complex networks needed for more mature comprehension of the world around you. So in your earliest years, your brain cells sought out and formed thousands of connections each day. While some of that process was genetic, your experiences were the primary catalyst that initiated connections and told you what went where and did what, and who was who. As a three-year-old, you had twice as many neural connections as you do today. Why? As you grew older your brain sought to become more efficient.

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From about ten years old until adulthood, trillions of connections in your brain were systematically eliminated. How? According to use. Those connections that were reinforced—your daily interactions with caregivers, the ways you found nourishment, the language you used to communicate, your understanding of your environment, certain character traits—were locked in. Those connections that were not reinforced were treated as unnecessary or inefficient data in your brain and were promptly relegated to your brain’s version of a junk folder.

One of the primary connections that was not reinforced was your connection with creativity.

At five years old, you went to school and, if that school was like the great majority of schools in the Western world, by about fourth grade an invariable learning style and a static theory of success and failure was reinforced daily. Becoming a big girl or big boy meant you needed to begin breathing out the results of the data you breathed in. Not a dynamic or personal translation of that data or a natural, cumulative revelation of that data—no, you were required to breathe out your teachers’ and your books’ translation of that data. Give the “right” answers, in other words. Suddenly, the hallmarks of your relationship with creativity—unbridled curiosity, unlimited fantasy, and discovery through trial and error—were no longer reinforced. Before long, your brain shed its inherent, trustworthy connection with creativity.

This was growing up under the governance of traditional education: you breathed in the data that your teachers and books said you should breathe in, and you breathed out their translation of that

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data, which were the only answers you needed to know in order to move on to the next grade with your friends, and ultimately grow into a smart, hardworking grown-up who could do anything you wanted to do.

Unless, of course, you wanted to be someone or do something that required a lot of imagination or originality.

Turns out that's most of us. It's definitely you. In that case, you will need to unlearn how you were taught to think and learn.

More specifically, you'll need to figure out how to know and trust creativity again, as an adult, which starts with a clear understanding of what creativity really is. Turns out it has grown up, too.



Here's the good news: you can learn to trust creativity again. On a daily basis. As a result, you can learn to churn out more vibrant, imaginative results from your efforts.

Here's the bad news: that has nothing to do with dressing more casually or sipping more coffee or working in the corporate equivalent of a McDonald's playhouse. At best, those efforts might put you in the mood to be more creative, but they'll never generate more creative results on a regular basis.

Trusting and utilizing creativity as an adult involves simultaneously embracing two concepts that, in your mind right now, probably sit on two different planets. And yet these two concepts are the two sides of the same coin we call creativity. They also make up the title of this book:

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The Spark.

The Grind.

The Spark

The spark is what we traditionally think of as the start of creativity—an initial illumination. It denotes the most basic understanding, the lowest common denominator of creative production. It's what we first hope for when we're looking for that creative edge, that game-changing idea, that fresh catalyst for progress. We commonly refer to it as a lightbulb moment or a bolt of lightning. The inference is that it comes suddenly, unexpectedly.

Although I get the metaphors, they're actually poor ones. The truth is that the best ideas (and subsequent outcomes) are always the result of personal effort, and creative results can come to be expected. This is why the spark is a better symbol for creative insight.

The National Geographic Channel TV show *Naked and Afraid* provides a good, and quite unforgettable, example of what I mean by the spark. It's a reality survival show in which a male and female contestant, who've never met, are dropped off in some remote and unusually dangerous locale, sans clothes, and try to survive for twenty-one days on only the food, water, and shelter they find in the wild. In almost every episode, we're shown a scene in which the contestants are trying to start a fire. Next to locating water, starting a fire is arguably the most important key to their survival. Without fire they can't boil the impurities out of water to make it drinkable,

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they can't cook any meat they kill, and they can't warm themselves at night.

All they need is one spark to create an ember that ignites their nest of kindling. If and when they finally produce it, a celebration ensues, and life can go on.

I've watched contestants labor for hours into the night to light a fire using a primitive hand-drill or bow-drill method.

I've also watched contestants generate that ember in a matter of minutes. Either way, the result—that life-giving fire—was predicated on at least some personal effort rather than some paranormal (or meteorological) force.

Generating creativity is, at the outset, like that. It takes a personal effort to make the initial spark—whether it is an idea, strategy, or product—that you hope will ignite your relationship or company or campaign. Thomas Edison once locked himself and five coworkers in his lab, where they labored for sixty hours without sleep to finish a working printing machine. That's more work than a Starbucks espresso and one album on your noise-canceling headphones.

You have to be careful how you perceive the spark. History loves to trivialize creative output, as it has Isaac Newton's work on gravity with the popular anecdote that it hadn't come to him until that old apple fell on his head. Then, suddenly, the spark glowed to life. The truth is that many Newton biographers—Pulitzer Prize-finalist James Gleick being one of them—aren't convinced the falling apple incident ever happened. There is no mention of it in his own writings. Whether or not it's true doesn't matter, though, because what

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we do know is that discovering gravity was no serendipitous moment. Newton ignited many sparks for many years. He built a working model of a windmill at age eleven. He discovered the color spectrum and calculus when he was in his midtwenties. Approximately twenty years later, in his midforties, he discovered and published his findings on the three laws of motion, from which all modern physics is derived. And then came gravity.

If Newton stopped with his first spark, he would be known today—if he was at all—as the boy who built a working model of a windmill at age eleven. But he didn't stop there. Isaac Newton was driven to understand how things worked. He immersed himself in all facets of math and science. When the plague hit Cambridge University and a college-aged Newton was forced to return home to the English countryside, he created a small study in his parents' home. In this study, he pulled out a blank thousand-page journal that he named his Waste Book and then, according to biographer James Gleick: "He began filling it with reading notes [which] mutated seamlessly into original research. He set himself problems; considered them obsessively; calculated answers, and asked new questions. He pushed past the frontier of knowledge (though he did not know this). . . . Solitary and almost incommunicado, he became the world's paramount mathematician." Newton filled his Waste Book with more than one million words before he made concrete discoveries. Before he was a famous mathematician, before he understood gravity, Newton would have been called neither an innovator nor a creative. If anything, he would have been called a hard worker who was

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very curious. Fortunately, it was in this context—diligently stoking the sparks of his imagination—that the results of his efforts caught fire.

Which brings us to the other side of the coin.

The Grind

The grind is the work of creativity.

This is the first truth you have to understand about creative endeavors: the spark comes to life at the expense of the grind. You will always run into problems when your efforts stop at the initial spark because rarely is the first spark the hottest, most potent spark. This was clearly true with Edison, who went on to win more than a thousand patents—including the iconic lightbulb—by working eighteen-hour days most of his life and famously finding “10,000 ways that won’t work.”

Creativity is no longer natural or free like it was when you were a young child. As an adult, it takes you more work to ignite a single spark than most people want to admit. And you have the critical eyes of others or the accountability of a marketplace surrounding you. But there’s an important caveat. And this is the second truth you have to understand about creativity: it’s a numbers game.

One spark alone is rarely enough. The more you grind at any given endeavor, the more you learn: about the process, about the outcomes, and about yourself. Your increased competence increases the likelihood of generating more sparks—or a bigger spark than the

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original. The more and bigger sparks you generate, the more likely you are to ignite an extraordinary blaze.

Ongoing, original creativity requires the spark and the grind: the initial flicker of hope and the work to stoke it into something that changes the game. Always both, never just one. In the coming pages, we will dive into the intricacies of both, the best practices as well as the pitfalls to avoid. For now, let's make sure we're clear on why both are necessary.

The Spark Without the Grind

The spark without the grind is the land of dreamers: coffeehouses across America, exposed-beamed scored-cement office buildings. Such places are the temples of creativity-seekers and people who might call themselves creatives. But the final measure of creativity, innovation, revolution is neither ideas nor dreams. It's whether those sparks grow into something that matters. Martin Luther King Jr. had a dream. He went about stoking it into a blaze that cleansed our nation. Would the spark have ignited as it did if King had only given a single speech?

People who chase the spark but don't embrace the grind are into igniting big ideas but not fanning them into a tangible blaze. Others might call them "idea people" and "visioneers," but the wake of their finished work reveals the truth. I call them Igniters. They are tempted to enjoy the reputation of creativity—the iPad commercial version—but not the reality of creativity.

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Being an Igniter is harmless (sort of) if your objective is creating a provocative social media profile or garnering attention at a dinner party. But being an Igniter is frustrating and insufficient if you're trying to make fresh progress. Dreamers and visionaries are wholly necessary in our world; but left alone, the ideas they ignite would remain undeveloped.

All is not lost, however. There is hope for the Igniters of the world.

The Grind Without the Spark

The grind without the spark is what we feel when we say work is a grind. It is work for the sake of working, spinning your wheels, continual effort without meaningful progress. In other words, what makes the grind more grindlike is an absence of sparks, an absence of freshness or originality. The grind's effect on us is ultimately a matter of how it is used and what it produces.

It's not enough to grind only for money or position or prominence. These results have diminishing returns. You burn out. You fail and can't find the will to grind again. The results that grow your strength and willingness to keep grinding—that give meaning to the grind—are visceral. Meaning lives inside us. But it is manifest through the act of creation. When your work does not bring pieces of yourself into being, it quickly becomes a maddening grind. When your work does manifest pieces of you, the hours you must put in rarely matter.

Those who embrace the grind but not the spark, I call Grinders.

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They wholly embrace labels that denote a strong work ethic; they gravitate to descriptions like “disciplined” and “driven” (because they sound a lot sexier than “cog” or “workaholic”). Hard work plays a critical role in anything, obviously. The reality, however, is that no one likes grinding for something that doesn’t matter to them personally. If you’re a Grinder, you know this is true whether or not you’re willing to admit it (something that took me nearly a decade to do). It’s exhausting to fake and yet millions do every day. Four thousand years ago, King Solomon wisely noted that because the traditional fruits of our labor—fame, possessions, titles—are inevitably meaningless; the best approach to life is to eat, drink, and grind at something that brings us joy (my paraphrase). In other words, the only grind that matters is the one that illuminates and fans the sparks inside us.

If you’re a Grinder, it’s time to open up and get real about why you grind. If you’re willing to do this, there’s hope for you, too.



“We are born makers,” writes Brené Brown, “and creativity is the ultimate act of integration—it is how we fold our experiences into our being.” To be more creative more often—to be the maker you were born to be—you must learn to chase the spark and embrace the grind, not at the expense of each other but in concert with one another. This dualistic approach is what separates those who create constantly from those who struggle to create even when it matters most.

Before we get into the meat of what it takes to chase the spark

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and embrace the grind, it's good for all of us to remember that lightbulbs, iPods, and theories of gravity throughout history were never the result of the first spark. In the pages that come, we will dig into the original spark and ongoing grind behind some iconic creations, as well as the life-changing innovations of regular people like me and you. But to begin, let's be clear on one thing: your ideas, efforts, and creations rarely fall short because you aren't intrinsically creative enough. They fall short because you either fail to grind your sparks, or you fail to spark your grind. When you learn to do both, then you will know how to start a blaze.

In this book, we'll explore what it really takes to be creative on regular basis. I use the term "really takes" from a place of personal conviction. Because here's my first confession: before I was an artist, before I was an author, before I figured out how to know and trust creativity, I was, for most of my life, a card-carrying corporate Grinder.

Yes, really.

I treated creativity like a sunset. I believed if I showed up at the right place and time, I had only to wait for it to appear like the glorious orange and pink hues of an evening sky. I could then bask in its glow, inhale its shot of inspiration, before it faded away. I even convinced myself that certain locations gave me better access to it, a better view, if you will, with a chance to capitalize on creativity a little longer.

The beach ten miles from my house.

Poolside in my backyard.

The empty foothills east of my home.

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Peet's Coffee & Tea down the road.

These were the places where I believed the magic embers lay waiting to be stoked. Whenever I needed them, I'd go there, poke around, and ignite a game-changing idea for my family, my career, or my business.

Then I'd pack up my Moleskine and get back to work.

Creativity was something I pursued only when I needed it. Aside from these fleeting, utilitarian moments of ignition, my days were governed by the grind. I grabbed hold of each morning with a vice-grip and pounded the subsequent hours into whatever shape I needed them to be.

It felt good. Strong. Productive. My career goals were singular and my strategy was focused: work as hard as possible to acquire as much net worth as possible in the shortest amount of time possible. The strategy worked well for eight years—until the economy began to show some cracks . . . and then imploded.

The dot-com boom busted at the turn of the century and my financial security went with it. I was in sales and suddenly companies that had been eager to pay for my company's service were now holding on to their discretionary income.

What do you do when your customers stop spending money? I did what most do. I dialed up creativity in hopes of igniting that spark that would keep me rolling, in hopes of finding an idea that would differentiate me from those who were struggling, and that would boost my business so it wouldn't fail. I needed to find a way to keep selling in a marketplace that had suddenly stopped spending.

I dialed up creativity . . . and redialed . . . and redialed again. I

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tried the beach, the café, the mountains, the pub, the church, and the gym. As they say, I left no stone unturned to find some spark, just one good idea that could save my business and career.

What had worked for me in the past—grinding more hours—worked only now and then. I'd close a deal and think, *Th s is it! I'm on my way back!* Then I wouldn't close anything for weeks. Then weeks turned into months. I worked more and more. Nothing seemed to stop the slide. I didn't know what I needed, and I certainly didn't know where to find it when I needed most.

At the beginning of 2002, I accepted the inevitable and resigned before I was penniless. Even then, my wife, Tasha, and I didn't have enough to last for long, a few months at best, and it wasn't just ourselves we were supporting—we had three young boys to feed.

My career was gone. My financial security erased. Worst of all, my pride in being a proficient businessman was swirling down the toilet. I had so closely associated my net worth with my self-worth that when one started evaporating, so did the other. I began emotionally spiraling. It made me physically nauseated to think of my losses. I felt like shit. I kept asking, *How could this happen?* I'd never once been lazy. Never once cut corners. Never once missed a deadline—hell, I'd been early most of the time. Always did right by my clients. How, then? And why?

Though I didn't know it yet, the answer to my questions centered around my relationship—or lack thereof—with creativity. When I needed a spark to save my livelihood I couldn't find one. My hard-ass work had succeeded for so long that it was truly alarming

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when I could not resurrect my career by grinding even harder. I certainly could have found solace in many unhealthy addictions—fortunately, I stumbled onto an unlikely possibility instead. In retrospect, I needed the grind to fail me before I ever would have considered looking for new sources of hope.

In the ashes of my loss, desperate and free from my old expectations, I was introduced anew to creativity. The reintroduction eventually changed everything—my career, my outlook, my marriage, my skills, my future. In truth, knowing the real creativity introduced me to my whole self and prompted me to become all I was made to be. I was given a new lens through which to view the world.

It started when, in my desperation to uncover a new career path, I dove into the local artist community in Southern California. I wasn't looking for financial advice. I was looking for sparks and I figured artists had a lot of them. I befriended these people and talked shop with them. I enjoyed their world and began to associate myself with it. But the more time I spent with them the more I learned, to my surprise, that the majority were starving despite being very talented. Most were not taking in enough money to pay their monthly bills, and because their art was not being recognized, they had started to become detached and highly opinionated, believing that the world just didn't "get" them. Many descended into self-absorption and even depression. They worked other jobs to make ends meet or they scraped by.

Because I'd just come from the corporate world I also noticed many of these same people held a subtle apathy toward personal

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discipline. They created when the spirit moved them, not with any regularity, and they were mostly uninterested in basic business strategies, like marketing and distribution and sales, to elevate their careers. They expected making good art to naturally evolve into making good money. They believed buyers would eventually notice them. Trouble was, as far as I could tell, they almost never did.

That was my first hint that there was a fundamental reality about progress—from the first step to sustaining improvement and avoiding collapse—that I had been missing. If discipline and integrity weren't enough to keep a career or business alive, and ideas and talent weren't enough to guarantee a person would thrive, then what was?

I'll tell you the full story a bit later, but for now I'll just say that when the lights went on for me a few weeks later, I realized I was on to something big, an idea that I'd never read in any business or personal growth book before. The essence is this: all progress rises and falls on our relationship with creativity. And because that's true, the key to constant improvement—whether it's renovation, transformation, or resurrection that's needed—is understanding how to stay connected to creativity.

This paradigm is like nothing I'd considered before losing my career. But I am tangible testimony to its effectiveness.

Today I am doing what I was made to do. Most people who've met me in the last fourteen years call me a speed painter or an artist, but those are just job descriptions. Yes, I paint large portraits in three minutes from stage. In doing so I often look like the definition of an Igniter, full of ideas and inspiration. But pulling off 100 keynote performances around the world each year for more than a decade

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requires more than ideas and inspiration. To get where I am, and to keep improving, I've embarked on a constant, strategic grind. To this day I am still more naturally a Grinder than an Igniter. But crucially, I've learned how to be both every day, and each time I step onto a stage. I've learned how to keep igniting ideas and keep grinding them out.

As I've grown and evolved as an artist, a speaker, a business owner, and a consultant, I've picked up a few lessons along the way. But because I'm a deconstructor by nature, I haven't learned dozens and dozens of trendy tips about creativity. I've learned a few timeless truths. I'm far more interested in what has always worked—regardless of era, fashion, and cultural context—than in the latest hack that works today but may be cliché tomorrow. In the last decade and a half, I've asked a lot more “whys” about being creative than “whats”: I've constantly asked why creativity is a constant stream in some people and not in others. Asking that question has led me to a much shorter list of “whats” and “hows” surrounding constant creativity—seven, to be precise.

While I'll never claim to own an exhaustive list of keys (because I'm always learning and honing), the pages that follow lay out what I believe—through study, experience, and personal application—are the seven practices you must embed not just into your daily routine but also into your mind-set and spirit if you want to be creative on a regular basis in any area of your life.

In laying these out for you, my deepest hope is not only that your daily responsibilities will immediately be injected with a new sense of vibrancy and meaning; it is also that the trajectory of your

THE SPARK AND THE GRIND

life and career and business will expand and become more colorful and potent with possibilities that once seemed impossible, unrealistic, or out of character. I want you to enter into an ever-passionate, ever-productive relationship with creativity that inspires and continues to change you for the rest of your life.

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